

## OWENS-CORNING CANADA

Mission, BC

[www.owenscorning.com](http://www.owenscorning.com)

### Siding manufacturer upgrades technology for a safer workplace

Manufacturing vinyl siding is a business with lots of industrial hazards. When Owens-Corning took over the Mission-based Vytec Corporation, injuries were reduced by investing in some high tech equipment, introducing safer work practices and by taking advantage of help from WCB's Focus Firm Strategy.

"At one time, safety was not the biggest thing on the priority list. Getting the product out was and everything else came second," says David Lordon, lead hand and chief union steward at Owens-Corning Canada. "Now it's about getting the box out, working safely and having a safe environment to work in."

"Our safety culture has changed," says Tom Ouellette, the company's health and safety specialist. "It's more visible. There are more people looking out for their fellow worker to ensure that they're working within the guidelines and the rules."

Rommie Cruz, WCB occupational hygiene officer in the Coquitlam/Fraser Valley region, says the new Owens Corning management believes putting more resources to health and safety is good value for them. "And the union, seeing that management is committed, realized that it's in the best interest of its members to work cooperatively with management on health and safety," she says.

The combined efforts of the Plant's Safety Committee, management and the employees themselves have instituted a lot of changes for the company's 70 employees. Everyone wears proper safety clothing and high visibility overalls or vests to be sure they can be seen in the plant and warehouse. Housekeeping and cleaning are now a priority. New employees receive a detailed orientation including safety information, and the company has a strong return-to-work program. Some of the more serious issues have been solved with technological changes.

"We had an issue of air quality," says Ouellette. "We put hood systems over the production lines to vacuum the stuff out of the air, put it into a filter system away from the employees so the air quality is tremendously improved."

Owens Corning has also lowered the air pressure in the glue station to relieve the amount of overspray. Improvements have been made to ventilation in the blender area, where raw materials are mixed for production and bought vests with an air system that blows cool air over the worker's body all the time.

"Management is right onboard with safety around here," states Ouellette. "If I mention something is unsafe around here, they change it around to make it safe, either through engineering, training or personal protective equipment."

The company's injury rate was two to three times the industry average for several years before becoming a focus firm in 1999, but their investment in safety is paying off. In 1999 they had only seven lost-time accidents, compared to 17 in 1998. "The injury rate dropped like a rock in 1999 to below industry average, which is quite significant," says Cruz.

"It has been a positive experience being a focus firm," says Ouellette. "It falls in line with our in-house action plan, and being a focus firm has made that easier to get buy-in from everyone."

Everyone agrees that a new philosophy towards safety is helping. "I like to go home every evening to my wife and children knowing that I have my limbs and my arms and knowing the company is thinking about my safety," says Lordon. "We are safer. We are trying to be safer."



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